

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8374
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3414

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PORG, AORG, UNRWA, SY, LE, JO, AU, XF
SUBJ: SYRIAN VIEWS TOWARD TRANSFER OF UNRWA HQ TO VIENNA

1. AHMAD ABD AL-HADI, DIRECTOR OF GENERAL ADMINISTRATION FOR PALESTINIAN ARAB REFUGEES (GAPAR) TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 13 THAT SYRIA WAS UNHAPPY WITH THE DECISION TO MOVE UNRWA HEADQUARTERS TO VIENNA BUT WOULD PROBABLY TRY TO "LIMIT THE DANGER" RATHER THAN TO PREVENT IT OUTRIGHT. ACCORDING TO AL-HADI, WHO HAS ONLY RECENTLY RETURNED TO WORK AFTER A HEART ATTACK, THE FIRST OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION HE HAD OF THE DECISION WAS A UNRWA PRESS RELEASE WHICH HAD ARRIVED SAME DAY ANNOUNCING THE MOVE. HE SAID HE WAS IN CONTACT WITH PALESTINE AFFAIRS DIVISION OF MFA TO COORDINATE SYRIA'S RESPONSE TO THIS DECISION.

2. AL-HADI SAID IT WAS HIS EXPECTATION THAT SYRIA WOULD TRY TO PERSUADE UNRWA TO LEAVE DEPARTMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR
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HEALTH AND EDUCATION POLICY IN THE AREA RATHER THAN MOVE THEM TO VIENNA.

3. AL-HADI ADMITTED THAT SYRIA HAD NOT MOVED VERY VIGOROUSLY TO TRY TO HAVE THE UNRWA HEADQUARTERS RELOCATED TO DAMASCUS BECAUSE OF UNSUITABILITY OF LOCAL FACILITIES, BUT HE SAID SUCH A MOVE WOULD HAVE BEEN WELCOMED. IN ANY CASE, SYRIA

WOULD HAVE PPREFERRED THAT HQ REMAIN IN BEIRUT OR GO TO AMMAN. HE QUESTIONED THE NEED FOR UNRWA TO MOVE OUT OF BEIRUT AT ALL SINCE THE UNRWA STAFF HAD ONLY RECENTLY RETURNED AND ASKED POLFF IF THIS WAS A "POLITICAL" DECISION. HE WAS ASSURED THAT THE US HAD NOT BEEN ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE DECISION AND THAT UNRWA HAD TOLD US THE MOVE WAS BEING MADE BECAUSE OF RECURRING SECURITY INCIDENTS WHICH THEY FELT WERE UNDERMINING THE MORALE OF THEIR STAFF.

4. COMMENTING ON UNRWA AFFAIRS IN SYRIA, AL-HADI AGAIN NOTED HIS DISPLEASURE, IN RESIGNED FASHION, TO THE CUTBACK IN FLOUR RATIONS, BUT EXPRESSED RELIEF THAT IT HAD NOT BEEN NECESSARY AS PREVIOUSLY EXPECTED TO CURTAIL PREPARATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS. HE SAID THAT FEW PALESTINIANS WERE PRESENTLY BEING DETAINED IN SYRIAN JAILS BUT THAT RECENTLY 40-50 PALESTINIANS SYMPATHETIC TO THE FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE (ABU ABBAS LOYALISTS) HAD BEEN ARRESTED. HE DENIED THAT THEIR ARREST HAD ANY CONNECTION TO THE MURDERS OF ALAWITES IN SYRIA. ALTHOUGH A BAATHIST AND A PALESTINIAN, HIMSELF, HE CONCEDED THAT THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN THE WAR IN LEBANON HAD LEFT DEEP SCARS ON THE SYRIAN-BASED PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY AND THAT PALESTINIAN BAATHISTS WERE NOW OFTEN INDIFFERENT AND APATHETIC TO THE BAATH PARTY. PELLETREAU

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